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REVIEWS

Il Libro dei Cinquanta Miracoli della Vergine. Edito ed illustrato da EZIO LEVI. Bologna, Romagnoli-Dall' Acqua, 1917. 8vo., pp. clxviii + 183. (*Collezione di Opere inedite o rare.*)

I Miracoli della Vergine nell' Arte del Medio Evo. EZIO LEVI. Roma, 1918. (*Estratto dal Bollettino d'Arte, del Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione. Anno XII, Num. 1-4, Gennaio-Aprile, 1918.*) 8vo., pp. 32.

All students of Italian literature have been grateful to the Italian Government for the splendid collection of *Opere inedite o rare* published at Bologna under the direction of the Royal Commission for Italian Texts. The first volume was published in 1863, and Levi's work is volume CI of the series, and it has been followed in January of the present fateful year by another, containing *Rime inedite del Cinquecento*, edited by Ludovico Frati. The series of *Testi di Lingua* was supplemented by the *Scelta di curiosità letterarie inedite o rare*, of which two hundred and fifty-seven volumes were issued between 1861 and 1894, when it ceased publication. To the above must be added the twenty-six volumes (1868-1893) of the periodical *Il Propugnatore*, devoted to brief texts and discussions. It would have been deplorable but natural had the *Collezione di opere inedite o rare* been suspended during the war; that the Government is continuing it is a wonderful tribute to the indomitable spirit of the Italians and their sense of responsibility for handing down to future ages the magnificent inheritance of the past.

The work of Signor Levi, who is professor of Italian in the Royal Naval Academy at Leghorn, is worthy of inclusion in the monumental *Collezione*. In brief, it is an edition of fifty miracles of the Virgin found in an Italian manuscript of the fourteenth century acquired by the National Library of Paris in 1892. The manuscript is of Venetian *provenance*, and the dialect in which it is written is Venetian also. The author was probably a monk of the Cistercian order. The work will be welcomed by the students of the Italian dialects, who will find in it all the necessary linguistic apparatus.

The work is, however, far more than a text of philological

interest; it is, as the editor says, perhaps the first collection of miracles made in Italy. Another feature of interest is that the fifty miracles are disposed in a certain order to illustrate the five prerogatives of the Virgin expressed in words beginning with the initials of her name: M.—memoraris; A.—aydatris; R.—remuneratrix; I.—illuminatrix; A.—advocata. In the numberless collections of miracles of the Virgin found in all the libraries of Europe no logical order is observed, but the stories are given pell-mell.

The editor's work is extensive and valuable. He has given an outline of the history of the miracles of the Virgin in mediæval literature, and examined the Latin collections. Then he passes in review the miracles of the Virgin in the various countries of Europe, and discusses in Chapter ix (pp. cviii-cli) the sources of the fifty miracles. In connection with this chapter, although placed later in the book, pp. 85-107, is a convenient list of the principal collections containing miracles of the Virgin and their relations to the Fifty Miracles edited by Levi. It is impossible to speak too highly of Levi's excellent work, and all students of this fascinating subject will be grateful to him for his erudition. The few additions which I shall offer are not in the way of criticism, but for the sake of completeness.

In the editor's survey in Chapter i of mediæval legendary literature should have been included Joseph Klapper's second and larger collection of *exempla*, Breslau, 1914, reviewed by me in *Mod. Lang. Notes*, Jan., 1917. Other works pertaining to this part of the subject may be found in my article "Recent Collections of Exempla," *Romanic Review*, vi, No. 2. In Chapter v, "I Miracoli nelle letterature germaniche," might have been mentioned the forty-six miracles of the fifteenth century edited by Johannes Bolte in *Alemannia*, xvii, 1-25, and Unger's *Mariu Saga*, Christiania, 1871. In Chapter ix, "Le Fonti dei Cinquanta Miracoli," it would be possible to add largely to the parallels from sources not at the editor's disposal or overlooked by him. I shall mention only a few of the most important. In No. 5, a monk thinks of his ass while praying; to punish himself for his fault, he sells the ass and gives the price to the poor. Levi remarks that he does not know the origin of this story. It is, however, one of the most popular of mediæval tales, going back to Odo of Cheriton (see Herbert, *Cat.*, pp. 64, 419, 460, 490, 530, 658; *Scala Celi*, f. 37 vo., and Étienne de Bourbon, p. 177). Herbert remarks, p. 419, that these versions

are probably all derived from Petrus Cantor, who tells the story of an Archdeacon Amandus, and refers to *Journal des Savants*, 1886, p. 681.

Another miracle for which Levi finds no source or parallel is No. 30: A widow takes great pleasure in the angelic voice of her son, a monk, when he sings in the choir. He dies and the disconsolate mother implores the mercy of the Virgin, who grants her to hear the voice of her son whenever she enters the church to pray. This beautiful story is found, so far as I know, in none of the great collections of miracles of the Virgin, nor have I found it in the miscellaneous collections analyzed in Herbert's *Catalogue*. A similar story, however, is in the *Legenda Aurea*, Chapter CXXI, but, instead of the Virgin, it is St. Mauritius who answers the widow's prayer. I have a faint recollection of having seen the story told somewhere of the Virgin, but I cannot now find the place.

There are a few incorrect attributions; *e. g.*, No. 38, in which the Virgin appears to a sinful but devout knight and offers him dainties in a foul dish, symbolical of the knight's welcome prayers but wicked life, is credited to Étienne de Bourbon, No. 397, and is said to be in Jacques de Vitry. This is incorrect, and Welter, *Speculum Laicorum*, p. 139, is also mistaken as to Étienne de Bourbon. For the story in general see Ward, *Cat.*, II, pp. 651, 665, 669, and Herbert, *Cat.*, pp. 394, 657.

In an appendix, "Rielaborazioni moderne dei miracoli medievali," the editor refers to the performance of "The Miracle" (the 41st of Levi's collection) by Reichhardt and Volmöller, music by Humperdinck, at Olympia in London in 1911, and afterwards as a "movie picture" at Covent Garden Opera House. Levi could also have mentioned Maeterlinck's "Sœur Béatrice," performed in this country by Madame Bernhardt. The same miracle is the subject of a poem, "A Ballad of a Nun," by John Davidson (*Ballads and Songs*, London, 1894). Another miracle, not in Levi's collection, has been made known to operagoers by Massenet in *Le Jongleur de Notre Dame*. The literary use of *exempla* (including miracles) furnishes a broad and fascinating field of study, and has hardly been touched by previous investigators.

In conclusion, it may be said that the *Cinquanta Miracoli* contain some of the most famous stories of this class, and they are sometimes narrated with dramatic force, but the editor does not claim

great artistic worth for his miracles, "non sono un capolavoro nè un prodigio."

Besides influencing literature, the mediæval miracles of the Virgin had considerable effect on painting and engraving. A number of illustrations from early printed editions of miracles of the Virgin were reproduced by Levi in the *Cinquanta Miracoli* besides two miniatures from manuscripts in the National Library of Florence. In a valuable article published in the *Bollettino d'Arte*, Levi has illustrated more fully the influence of the miracles of the Virgin on mediæval art. After some general remarks, with miniatures from the Spanish manuscripts of the *Cantigas* of King Alfonso X, Levi devotes considerable space to the pictorial representations of the miracle in which the Virgin releases from the clutches of the devil the child whose angry mother had consigned it to the demon. The "Madonna del Soccorso," as she is technically termed in this connection, is represented wielding a big stick, with which she drives away the devil. Some twenty-three paintings and frescoes of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are described, and some of them reproduced. All are in Italian churches, except one which has found its way to the museum of Montpellier in France.

The miracles of the Virgin play also an important part in the history of Italian engraving, on both wood and metal. Levi gives lists of these engravings, which will be of great value to the collector. In an appendix a list is given of the engravings in the collection of Doctor Achille Bertarelli of Milan. In a second appendix Signor Umberto Gnoli gives a supplementary account of some further representations of the "Madonna del Soccorso" in churches of the Peninsula.

The two works of Levi are admirable specimens of the erudition and good taste which mark Italian scholarship. They also enable us to realize the treasures of imagination contained in mediæval legendry and transmuted more often than we think into literature and art.¹

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¹ Students of this extensive field of mediæval literature will be interested to learn that I have procured after many vain efforts a copy of the forty-